

Week of April 30

By Sage Sassafras

Green Stretch

Earth Day has come and gone but we'll hear a lot more about green ups and tree plantings and oh, it's so great to see the grass again we can hardly stand it. Everything is ready: gardening gloves, muck boots, rakes, shovels, pitchforks, you name it, are all good to go. But what about you? Are you up for the lugging and stretching and bending and kneeling that a garden requires?

Just like any other activity – think biking, hiking, skiing (no let's forget the latter because that requires snow and we are so over that) – tasking our body to function as a relatively fluid machine requires strategies for survival. In the case of gardening, we call it the Green Stretch.

And if the thought of stretch pains you now, that pain is nothing compared to finishing that first day in the garden only to find yourself sidelined nursing a sore back or neck or knees for a couple of days because you weren't in the proper condition to garden. And in this economy, can you justify a masseuse?

Let's get ready now to tackle that garden in good physical shape.

The trick is stretch, stretch, stretch. Grab a rake; put it behind your neck and hold on to it at both ends. Rotate your trunk to the left and the right, holding at each side for a count of five. Repeat 10 times to each side. Do this before and after each day in the garden.

Be a tree hugger. Go up to one of your sturdy trees, stand with your legs slightly apart, grab that tree about waist level and stretch out away from the tree, rounding your back. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat. Use the tree again by moving one foot closer to the tree and one behind; gently stretch your calf muscles, holding for five seconds each time. Change feet and repeat.

Now, take a large empty clay pot; place it in front of your feet about six inches away, squat down, keeping feet firmly on the ground. Grab and lift the pot, standing up and using your legs to lift and repeat 10 times, each time imagining what is going to grow in such profusion once the pot gets planted.

If you do these exercises daily for the next couple of weeks, your spring gardening experiences are sure to be much less stressful on your body and your mind.

Happy gardening and don't forget to check out the website www.woodstockgardenclub.org. Remember that Mother Nature needs all the coddling we can give her.